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CANADA'S NEW GOVERNMENT, TREATY 6, TREATY 7 AND TREATY 8 FIRST NATIONS AND ALBERTA EMBARK ON NEW APPROACH TO CHILD WELFARE ON RESERVE

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Calgary, Alberta (April 27, 2007) - A partnership with Canada's New Government, the Province of Alberta and Alberta's First Nations was announced today that will see significant improvements in child and family services for First Nations in Alberta.

The partnership, based on the Alberta Response Model and Alberta's Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, was announced by the Honourable Jim Prentice, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, the Honourable Janis Tarchuk, Minister of Alberta Children's Services and representatives of Alberta's three Treaty areas: Spokesperson Chief Eddy Makokis on behalf of the Confederacy of Treaty 6 First Nations; Spokesperson Chief Charles Weasel Head of the Treaty 7 First Nations Chiefs Association; and Grand Chief Arthur Noskey of Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta.

The Alberta Response Model, recognized as an innovative approach to child welfare, has proven that early intervention, prevention and permanent placement provide concrete results.

Since the introduction of the Alberta Response Model and the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, child intervention caseloads have decreased by 22 per cent. In First Nations Child and Family Service agencies without early intervention and prevention services, caseloads have increased by four per cent over the same period.

"I am encouraged that through this partnership we are addressing the critical child and family services issues facing First Nations children on reserves in Alberta," said Minister Prentice. "We want all children in need to be placed in safe and nurturing homes, and this new approach to child welfare in First Nation communities will provide families living on reserve with better access to community resources to help them before a crisis occurs."

Canada's New Government will immediately provide \$15.3 million for the first year of implementation in Alberta.

"This is a historic step forward and will fundamentally change the way child welfare services are delivered on reserve," said Minister Tarchuk. "Working together, all three parties have built on the proven success of the Alberta Response Model and our provincial Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act."

The First Nations of Treaty 6, Treaty 7 and Treaty 8 acknowledge that a new arrangement is long overdue. The family enhancement approach fits within the Treaty 6, 7 and 8 tradition of taking care of their own children. It provides First Nations agencies with new resources needed to identify a family's need before the situation requires a child to be removed from the family home. First Nations hold that the family is a core traditional unit and First Nations children will continue the legacy of their people.

"I congratulate Alberta First Nations for their work in creating a better approach to child welfare that focuses on prevention and collaboration," said National Chief, Phil Fontaine. "Today's announcement shows Minister Prentice has recognized the urgency of closing the gap in funding

received by First Nations Child Welfare Agencies compared to provincial child welfare agencies. This needs to be implemented in all regions. The Assembly of First Nations is prepared to work jointly to achieve this goal."

Provincial ministers have indicated that they are supportive of the partnership with Alberta and expressed interest in a similar approach.

The Honourable Judy Streach, Nova Scotia's Minister of Community Services, Minister responsible for the Disabled Persons Commission Act, said: "I support improving First Nations Child and Family Services and am very interested in continuing the discussions currently underway with our Mi'kmaq and federal partners in strengthening prevention services for children and families in Nova Scotia."

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Backgrounder - INAC, Alberta and First Nations Join Forces to Improve Child Welfare Services for First Nations Children

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Backgrounder - INAC, Alberta and First Nations Join Forces to Improve Child Welfare Services for First Nations Children

Canada's New Government is entering into a partnership with Alberta and First Nations in Alberta to improve First Nations Child and Family Services program in Alberta using the successful Alberta Response Model.

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada's First Nations Child and Family Services Program

The main objective of the Child and Family Services Program (CFS) is to ensure the safety and well-being of First Nations children on reserve by supporting culturally appropriate prevention and protection services for First Nations children and families. This is done in accordance with the legislation and standards of the province or territory of residence to create a more secure and stable family environment for children on reserve.

Alberta Response Model

The provincial government introduced the Alberta Response Model, a new approach to child welfare service delivery six years ago. It refers to the way services are provided to children and families who come into contact with the child welfare system.

The model ensures:

- Families receive the support and services they need before they reach crisis;
- Community-based services and the child welfare system work together so families receive more appropriate services in a timely manner;
- Children in care benefit from permanent homes sooner by, for example, involving families in planning alternative care options; and
- Services and supports are coordinated in the way that best helps the family.

Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act

The Alberta Response Model also outlined the need to review the Alberta *Child Welfare Act* to ensure the legislation could fully realize the intent of the model. The review resulted in the development of the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act*, which was proclaimed in November 2004.

The *Act* ensures families receive the services they need before they reach a crisis, more quickly establishes permanent homes for children in government care, allows increased access to adoption information and strengthens collaboration and sensitivity to Aboriginal and Métis needs.

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Child Welfare Service Delivery in Alberta

In Alberta, Child and Family Services authorities, funded by the provincial government, provide services to children and families in 10 regions throughout the province. Delegated First Nations Agencies deliver services to families living on reserve. These agencies receive funding from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

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